

Hope in the Sky



Celestial Hope

A visit to a brand new Heesen 47-metre, the second of the high-speed semi-planing 47-metre Heesens (*Sirocco* was the first), evolved into a fascinating conversation with Sergei Dobroserdov and Piers Flood of Nakhimov – a yachting service company that is neither really/only broker, manager or client’s representative, yet provides the function of many of those activities to provide a full service to – for now – Russian clients. I also encountered Kamini Ezralow, the MD of Intarya, the design studio that created *Celestial Hope’s* eclectic and (albeit invisibly) practical interior.

CELESTIAL HOPE IS A HANDSOME WELL-PROPORTIONED YACHT and her lines are well emphasised by the maroon striping or lining that runs from bow to stern. That line is also highly representative of Sergei’s approach to a project – total involvement aside constant reiteration until the optimum is arrived at. Nakhimov have considerable skills, with 11 personnel in their lean operations in Moscow and Monaco, and even when they are working with external third-party suppliers they are firmly in charge in implementing the owner’s desires; as whole superyacht integrators or Uber Reps as it were.

The key for Sergei is to fully understand what the client wants as well as of course enabling him or her to understand what they can have – fundamental to knowing what they want.

In the case of *Celestial Hope* the owner was quite specific in his needs. He is an experienced sailing yacht racer, therefore his motoryacht should be a house inside and – echoing his racing yacht – go wherever it can fast. The yacht has a top speed of more than 20 knots; also key was the simplicity of using Heesen’s semi production approach. Nakhimov are currently working on five build projects, ranging from a just-delivered 40-metre from Timmerman Yachts in Moscow to a 130-metre in the bidding stage. Each project gets a unique approach – the 130-metre, for example, is destined to be a cost plus project.

Heesen suits Nakhimov for this project because of the owner’s third criteria: that the yacht be built in Northern Europe. Sergei commented, “And so we made a selection for him, of different yards; we negotiated things and what we found out is that Heesen is perfectly specialised as a yard. Because if you want to have a fast boat, of, say, 50 metres, they are the only option you have. That’s why the yard, I think, is in a good position: they have a focus – a speciality.”



This yacht is the second of the 47-metre series, but has been thoroughly Nakhimov-ed. The GA was changed radically to incorporate a wonderful, massive study forward and – as most Russian clients need – a steam bath in the lazarette. In all, Sergei explained, “She has more than 76 major changes to interior and exterior.”

The interior is by Intarya and aboard I had a chance to chat with Kamini Ezralow, the MD of the company. She explained: “Well, the brief from the client was based on the movie ‘Something’s Got to Give’ – with Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton. It was set in the Hamptons so we devised a New England type feel: bright, fresh, beach-ey, but equally still very comfortable.”

This is a first yacht project for Intarya yet, “We are very fortunate, and really have to thank both Sergei, who was

very open minded, and the clients who wanted to have a residential feel. They liked our work, and he took a leap with us.” I asked how much of a challenge dealing with constraints imposed by ducting, piping and systems was for yacht interior first-timers: “Not much, because the type of work that we do is all about detail – attention to detail. It’s about the function of a space and giving the client maximum amount of storage. Growing up in Hong Kong (as Kamini did), you’re limited for space so that’s something that very early on in my career I worked very hard on. We did a lot of spatial planning and that was invaluable experience for me. Then being in London as well, you’re very space challenged.” On restraints imposed by technical needs her response was encouragingly perceptive of yachts’ special needs: “We worked very closely with Heesen and had monthly and bi-monthly meetings where we would implement our designs to take into account where all the pipework was, how much storage we could steal from certain cavities; so, OK, there’s a pipe duct here, but how can we improve the usable space round it?”

A pet peeve of mine is box shapes inside hull forms; I always assumed this was a common characteristic of the designer who was inexperienced in yachts. However, at least here it seems I was mistaken; “You have to follow the hull shape... as designers we have first of all an ultimate respect for the clients’ brief and how they want to experience that space, (but) then you respect the architecture of the space. And you

work within that...its very similar on residential projects. We work a lot with listed and older buildings.”

An unusual layout feature is on the upper owner’s deck where the bathroom and shower are in a central (athwartships) space without windows and surrounded by a walkway in the stateroom. It’s unusual yet effective and the concept of Sergei rather than client- or designer-driven.

The style elements are eclectic yet not overtly so. White overheads echo New England sailing yachts while original hand-crafted Venetian mirrors coexist in harmony beside modern door and bathroom furniture. There is also use of a finish, which at first I took for lacquer; it was not – rather it’s a form of mirroring with patterns painted on the rear of the glass, a traditional French technique called Verre Églomisé, with blue and silver, and is somehow very Russian. *Celestial Hope* also displays a broad variety of Russian art of various eras and styles.

While the *Celestial Hope* interior won “Most Innovative Interior Design of the Year 2009” at the Asia Boating Awards, Kamini’s studio looks set to make marine work a part of their future with another yacht contract on the cards. Kamini stated, “We are talking to another yacht client. Funnily enough it happens to be another Heesen and it’s a refit this time...yachts are a natural extension of our studio and it’s an exciting arm to our business.”





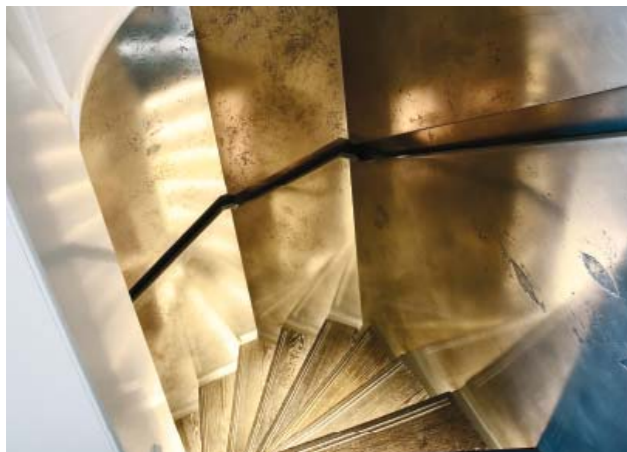
One factor Kamini recognised early on that will help that extension to be both practical and appropriate, as well as beautiful, is that: “This is a moving location, so wherever the boat goes it has to seamlessly, not really blend, but harmonise with the environment.”

The downside of the GA is that crew are somewhat short in numbers and accommodation somewhat squeezed, especially in view of the yacht’s destined role as a charter yacht; the complement is nine plus captain. Nakhimov manage the yacht operations holistically; not just concept to completion but also through life and operation. They believe that they are designing the yacht not only for the owner’s pleasure but also for efficient use; which is of course ultimately the same thing. Sergei’s response to my concerns about reduced crew numbers was typically pragmatic: “So it’s a bit tough, but it’s OK...This again is where we perhaps differentiate ourselves from other people. We studied, based on what the owner originally wanted, the specification and operation and we spoke a lot with Heesen right at the design stage.”

Ambitious career-oriented crew also have somewhat greater opportunities to pursue that career in a fleet of consistently managed yachts. While they may need to leave a given Nakhimov yacht to advance to the next stage they can stay in the fleet. The company – as is still rare in yachting – is the crew’s employer: “With Nakhimov Management all the crews are operated by us. This is our – let’s say mandatory – condition, working with the owners. If we are not hiring the crew ourselves we cannot be responsible for everything on board.”

This will of course mean that when MLC is ratified many of the regulatory requirements will be imposed on Nakhimov while other less complete management service companies will be able to operate with greater freedom. However, when I asked Sergei about this he was adamant that the extra regulation is worth it to provide a complete and controllable service. The concept of control is key and without it he feels you cannot guarantee the quality of experience, reliability and budget adherence that owners seek. It’s clearly also a less free and easy regime for crew, but is one with opportunity to move ashore when the time is right: “Another thing, when we have another project, for the crew here it’s a good opportunity to step into project management.”

Control also extends to choosing the right charter brokers that will ensure crew are rested. Piers Flood, Nakhimov’s Director of New Construction, commented: “Our responsibility as the representative of the owner is to advise the owner which charter company to deal with. Because there are some very responsible ones out there that know this boat does need a 48-hour turn around. As a minimum.”



In their relationship with captains it’s a combination of freedom and requirement. “We and the captain are doing different jobs. Ask a captain: do you want a manager? It’s a discussion all the time and of course nobody wants to be managed. But this is not our thing. We’re not managing the captain. And I think Rafael (Captain of *Celestial Hope*) understands that. We’re not managing him and his crew, we trust him. And what he’s doing, he’s doing on his own.” The shoreside manager’s requirements are extensive with regular reporting so that Nakhimov can be assured that all is on time, on budget and running as per the promise they made to the client. Clearly that means a lot of paperwork – especially in a leanly crewed charter yacht – but so far Rafael seems to be finding it do-able.

Rotation and training are encouraged. Rafael commented: “Yes, we have two engineers, we have our engineers on rotation at the moment, so it’s rotation engineer, three months on, three months off. And the one who is off is actually going for an MTU course in about a week’s time, and then the other one will also go on the course. And for the rest of the crew there’s a training programme that is probably scheduled for the end of the year, whenever we have a gap.” From his experience he recognises the two types of crew and clearly each can be used; but in a different scenario; “There’s two types – there’s the seasonal one who wants money for travelling or to do something and then there’s the serious guys who actually – and those are the ones Sergei says we need to concentrate our efforts on – want to go somewhere, so if we can help them they will of course stay and provide better service and for the owner also. It’s a win-win situation, or should be.”

What is the client mix for Nakhimov? Sergei: “Well at the moment they’re all Russians, because it just happened like that, but I do believe that our approach can be interesting for British or American clients, or any nationality.” About emerging markets Sergei is firm in his view; “There is only one market, it’s Russia. There are people who really want to invest a lot in yachting and Russia is the country that has changed the whole of yachting itself and I do believe in Russia. I don’t believe in China, I don’t believe in Brazil, I don’t believe in all the other emerging countries. They have an absolutely different philosophy. Different mentality, if you wish, for spending money on luxury items...I feel even in these times we can find at least four or five new owners every year – new potential clients every year. This is great for us and for all the others.”

Piers added: “I took The Annual Report figures last year and did some very careful analysis on what we know of the Russian market potential and what you’re saying







about the number of builds etc. And the figures are slightly conservative. I think there are probably around 20 people in our target market every year from Russia, of which maybe we'll get 25%." On the Russian client again, Sergei says: "OK, there have been the very well known, high level individuals, mostly from the sort of base industries, oil, gas, natural resources – but there's an enormous growth in the middle class there as well. OK, it's in a hiccup now, but there's huge potential still in Russia for people who are good businessmen to make really good money."

As managers how do Nakhimov view lay up or skeleton crewing? Piers: "Personally my feeling is that a yacht is an asset and like any asset you've got to look after it. So I'm sure if you look at it with an understanding of what the asset requires to keep its value, then there are percentages you can knock off. But just taking an axe doesn't work." Sergei added: "If I want to make a guy who is fat slimmer then I don't cut off his head."

Celestial Hope is a semi-series yacht, yet one that feels thoroughly individual and, as per brief, home-like. Yes, there are unlimited possibilities to change interiors and fabrics and this has been used to its fullest advantage, but the attention to detail with the 76 changes and the active cooperation of Heesen make *Celestial Hope* a truly unique vessel – despite not being in reality bespoke. That iron hand inside the iron glove of Sergei (former maritime lawyer turned superyacht entrepreneur) and Nakhimov may not suit every captain and crew or indeed every owner (some owners do like to be hands on about the operation of their yachts); however, there are enough of all three who will find it suits to keep this company growing and serving a specific part of the superyacht market in their very specific and planned way.

Tork Buckley

Images: Emilio Bianchi, Tork Buckley, Intarya (Edina van der Wyck & Richard Waite) and Heesen

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